

## Making More Memorable Speeches

Sometimes students are expected to participate in debates or speak. The study of rhetoric – a way speaking or writing meant to influence or impress people – was once at the heart of a classical education! Nowadays the only people who seem to employ it are politicians. Why not, then, teach our students a few rhetorical tricks which they can easily put into practice?

Here are some ideas you may like to draw on or add to.

1. Lists of three
2. Contrasts and paradoxes
3. Rhetorical questions
4. Adverbs to reinforce an argument
5. Use of metaphor / simile
6. Extended metaphor and analogy

### **Lists of three**

For some reason, human beings seem to be hard-wired to use lists of three. There are numerous examples which we can draw from a range of languages.

'Veni, vidi, vinci' (I came I saw I conquered) Julius Caesar

'Liberté , fraternité égalité' motto of the French people

'Government of the people, by the people, for the people' Abraham Lincoln

'Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few.'  
Churchill on the pilots of the Battle of Britain

'My foundations support people in the country who care about an open society. It's their work that I'm supporting. So it's not me doing it. But I can empower them. I can support them, and I can help them.' George Soros (financier and philanthropist)

Remember that in English when we say lists we tend to use a rising intonation on the first items, and a falling intonation on the final item to denote completion.

### **Contrasts and paradoxes**

Skilled communicators often bring two conflicting notions into collision.

'Man is born free and everywhere is in chains' Jean-Jacques Rousseau

Often this is used to humorous effect.

On the Continent people have good food; in England people have good table manners.

Continental people have a sex life; the English have hot water bottles. George Mikes (Hungarian writer and humorist)

### **Rhetorical questions**

Rhetorical questions are a useful device for moving from the statement of a problem or situation, to your proposals.

'So what is to be done?' Lenin

### **Adverbs to reinforce an argument**

Have you ever noticed that when politicians are giving opinions with little or no foundation in fact that they use adverbs to demonstrate the force of their convictions or sincerity?

I strongly urge you to act now...

I sincerely/honestly believe...

### **Use of metaphor / simile**

Speakers and writers need to use these sparingly unless they can come up with images which are arresting and memorable. Otherwise, it is easy to fall into cliché.

The office was a beehive of activity. (Metaphor: something is transformed into something else)

His horse was as black as coal. (Simile: (with 'as/like') something is compared to something else)

### **Extended metaphor and analogy**

Analogies and extended metaphors are a good way of reducing difficult concepts to more familiar notions which are easier for most of us to grasp. They are particularly useful for backing up, or illustrating big numbers or statistics.

Sales of her books could circle the globe/go to the moon and back etc. (More memorable than simply stating how many millions of books which have been sold).

The water wasted by farmers in unnecessary irrigation could fill ten Olympic swimming pools. (Better than of giving a dry statistic.)

A million dollars in \$100 bills is nine feet high.

Metaphors are used in the world of business and finance. Metaphors associated with sport, war and conflict are often used. Water is popular too: we talk about cash flow, company liquidity and flotations. Sometimes it may be hard to sustain a metaphor through a speech or piece of writing and we should take care that we do not mix them. However; one metaphor which does work effectively is for money laundering.

'Money laundering takes dirty money with a criminal history and transforms it into clean money, which looks legitimate. We can talk about the pre-wash, heavy soaping and spin dry of money laundering.'

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